OPINION

BY MUHAMMAD ILYAS KHAN AND ALIYA KHALID

Unlearning old ways

PAKISTAN's education system has struggled to evolve beyond traditional patterns where reproduction is prioritised over the application of knowledge and skills. Thinkers such as John Dewey and Paulo Freire have long argued that education should connect classrooms with lived realities, and be outcome-oriented. An Outcome-Based Education system (OBE) has gained currency globally over the last three decades, while Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) became popular in Pakistan after they were included in the National Curriculum of 2006, followed by the Single National Curriculum (SNC) of 2020. Unfortunately, the idea to make education more relevant was not implemented. Countries like the United States and South Africa have already experimented with this approach to education without much success in bringing about educational reforms. Pakistan has adopted a diluted version that focuses on changing assessments but overlooks pedagogical transformation.

Inspired by the works of John B. Carroll, Benjamin Bloom, and William Spady, who redefined learning, the OBE system was supposed to align learning with measurable results. Carroll argued that learning is not limited by innate ability but by the time invested and the quality of instruction. He suggests that with opportunity and support, most learners can achieve mastery. Bloom took the idea forward with 'mastery of learning' through translating subjects with formative assessments, and encouraging higher-order thinking. Spady presented OBE as a reinterpretation of the education process to ensure that learners achieve essential outcomes. This approach focused on clarity of focus, high expectations, and wider opportunities for students.

In essence, the OBE was conceived as a philosophy of empowerment, not a bureaucratic exercise in assessment. This demands that curricula, teaching, and assessment flow seamlessly from one another so that learning is not merely tested but understood and applied. Pakistan's steps towards reforming education, however, have overturned this idea as a greater emphasis is placed on assessment rather than on pedagogy and philosophy. The result is a system where learning is measured before it is cultivated. Globally this method was not successful when it was put into practice.

In Pakistan, practice is divorced from the theory. The National Curriculum 2006 identified hundreds of SLOs across subjects, detailing what students should know and carry out. The SNC 2020 reinforced this model. But key systemic dimensions — alignment of teaching methods, resources, assessment systems, time allocation, teacher training, and professional development — are unchanged. Classroom teaching continues to be teacher-centric, learning by rote dominates, and instruction depends on textbooks alone. Examinations remain recall-based, especially in secondary and higher secondary levels. Teachers, often untrained in the curriculum principles and instructional methods, treat SLOs as bureaucratic checklists rather than guiding frameworks. Thus, the rhetoric of OBE reforms is visible on paper but classroom realities remain outdated. Pakistan's effort to adopt SLOs-based education can, therefore, be seen as merely technical rather than a comprehensive and enforced policy. As a result, the range of outcomes has been limited to the lower rungs of Bloom's categorisation, which means learning without critical thinking and skills. Teachers and students remain engaged in old practices with new labels.

For constructive educational reforms to happen, there is a need for the understanding and implementation of OBE without tampering with its fundamental philosophy that promotes higher expectations, multiple opportunities, and structural alignment around learner success. Real reform will depend on teachers who will always be the driving force of educational change. They need sustained professional development, conceptual clarity, and institutional support to implement this shift in both letter and spirit.

> Pakistan's education system is one where learning is measured before it is cultivated.

A country that is grappling with economic uncertainty, political instability and climate disasters cannot allow education to take a backseat any longer as it is the most crucial tool for crisis management. Undeniably, a shift from an education system that often fails to develop authentic learning is an uphill task. However, this path must be taken with resolve and political commitment so that the youth can participate productively in the country's progress and prosperity. ■

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BY FARHAN ANWAR

Search for legality

THERE is an 'anti-encroachment' operation ongoing in Karachi where, in addition to street vendors being removed, shops that are found to be extending their operations onto the streets are being shut down. In the absence of a viable, workable solution, such operations will continue without yielding any positive dividends.

Karachi possesses a rich tradition of street vendors, selling goods and extending services to an expanded clientele. These vendors form part of a much larger, though not fully documented economic sector in Pakistan. The Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, in a 2020 research survey, estimated that around 936,000 people, accounting for one per cent of the urban population in Pakistan, are operating as street vendors. Research by the Urban Resource Centre estimates that there are 150,000 hawkers operating in Karachi.

However, it is deeply concerning that despite the fact that vendors form a significant part of the economy, serving diverse socio-economic classes, their informality gets cross-referenced with illegality. Informality only assumes a wider footprint when a state fails to provide security, justice and opportunity for economic growth and serves as a reflection of state dysfunctionality. So, a successful transition from *informality* to *formality*, from a status of *illegality* to *legality* can only be achieved through improved government writ and efficiency.

Continued existence of this informality-cum-illegality serves as a denial of dignity in work for thousands of associated marginalised communities. Such a policy action will help bring compliance with Pakistan's commitments to a number of relevant ILO treaties and conventions, and the SDG framework. Furthermore, synergy will be created with the fundamental rightsenshrined in the Constitution.

Legitimising this economic sector opens up opportunities for empowering communities on the margins — women, religious minorities, people with special needs and in general the poorest of the poor. This can happen both through better support to communities already part of the economy and also by incentivising the unemployed to enter this sector, creating a synergy with empowerment platforms such as BISP, Sindh Poverty Reduction Strategy and other such programmes. Global best practices are documented and can be referenced on how successfully policymakers worldwide have incorporated measures for reducing poverty, unemployment and empowering the marginalised by legalising the street economy.

The government, by not extending legal recognition, is also losing out on a substantial revenue base. Financial returns that could have been deposited in the municipal revenue banks which are already stretched thin, through taxation and land rent end up in the pockets of corrupt officials through rent-seeking. Financial inclusion, by devising mechanisms such as savings accounts, loans, digital wallets and business transactions, can positively impact operations and economic growth for medium and small-scale enterprises. Opening up of a new, digitised and growing economic sector would complement the government's strongly stated resolve to digitise the economic sector.

Policy research indicates that SME banks are willing to offer loans and services, such as for funding operating costs, in the case of street vendors, but would feel confident if the government gives the sector proper legal recognition and institutes fiscal measures such as offering subsidies and infrastructure access.

> It is concerning that street vendors get cross-referenced with illegality.

There is a strong rationale for improved urban planning and development. A spatial design intervention for creating vendor zones can become part of a larger urban planning initiative that can be triggered by the preparation of an urban street designmanual for Karachi. Interventions for vending zone design can create multiple design and operational zones that may be located at the neighbourhood, market, institutional or recreational level.

The ongoing preparation of the Greater Karachi Regional Plan 2047 can provide a space for official recognition and acceptance for such planning and design interventions.

It is understood that given the extended period where this illegality has been tolerated, strong vested interests and institutional inertia have developed, resisting change. However, the Sindh government has shown the resolve to take decisions to bring transparency and accountability to government functions. Given the strong rationale highlighted for making this policy shift, it is expected that appropriate action will be taken. ■

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FROM THE PAST PAGES OF DAWN

1976 | Fifty years ago

Bhutto slates Opposition

HYDERABAD: Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto said today [Jan 22] that Pakistan People's Party is a dynamic, revolutionary organisation ever striving for people's welfare … to usher in an era of progress and prosperity for the common man. Inaugurating the two-day convention of [PPP] workers … at the Niaz Stadium, the [PM] said the striking achievements of the PPP Government in the past four years could not be taken lightly… . He said … achievements were to be assessed by comparison with those made by other Governments in 25 years. He described the adoption of Constitution as a major achievement… . …Mr Bhutto slated the role of Opposition parties in the country which was often erratic and self-contradictory. — Staff Correspondent

[Meanwhile, as reported by news agencies from Beirut,] a Syrian-backed cease-fire won agreement from all sides in Lebanon's bloody civil war today [Jan 22] raising hopes of end to the conflict that has left Muslim militiamen and Palestinian guerrillas in control of two-thirds of the country. The latest cease-fire announcement was the 26th since the war began nine months ago… . At least 10,000 persons [have] died in the bitter fighting.

1951 | Seventy-five years ago

'Brook no delay'

KARACHI: Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan told a Press conference in Karachi yesterday [Jan 22] that the Kashmir question cannot brook any delay. "It must be dealt with by the Security Council at the earliest possible moment," he added. He said there were only two courses open to Pakistan to settle the issue: "One was to pursue the matter in the Security Council. The second I would not tell you."

"Six months is a long period in this fast moving world," was the Prime Minister's reply to the question: "What would you do if the Security Council did not succeed in settling the issue in six-months time?" The Prime Minister stressed that demilitarisation of Kashmir was "the vital question". Nothing else could happen unless this matter was settled, he emphasised.

The Commonwealth Prime Ministers proposals for withdrawal of troops, he said, were "very likely" to be brought before the Security Council by some party or the other. He explained that the phrase "narrowed down" used for Pakistan-Bharat differences on Kashmir in the 10 Downing Street announcement meant that instead of wandering through jungles of arguments they came down to brass-tacks and discussed the definite issue of withdrawal of troops. — Dawn Staff Correspondent

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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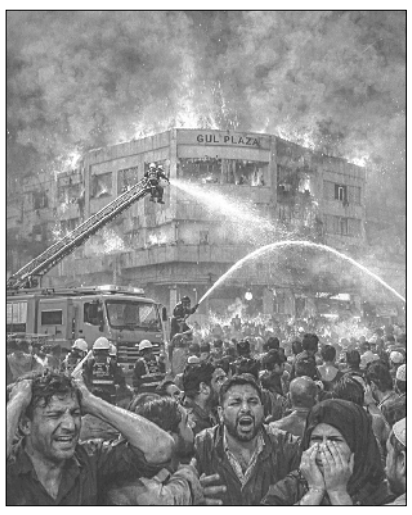
Letters may be edited for purposes of clarity and space. All letters should carry the writer's address, CNIC and phone numbers.



Let Gul Plaza fire be a wake-up call

THIS is with reference to the report 'Another day of anguish as seacrh for missing persons continue' and editorial 'Predictable tragedy' (Jan 20) related to the tragic fire at Gul Plaza shopping mall in Karachi. The loss of precious lives and the widespread destruction of property were not unavoidable acts of fate. They were the result of systemic negligence. These deaths could have been prevented, and the damage significantly reduced, had the building been constructed and maintained in line with established fire safety and building regulations.

Across Pakistan, unsafe construction and electrical practices remain disturbingly common and continue to be a leading cause of commercial fires. The use of substandard or aluminium wiring, loose connections, poor-quality cables unable to handle high voltage, overloaded circuits, wiring concealed under carpets, poorly installed extension cords, and a lack of routine maintenance together create serious fire hazards.

Smoking and electrical short circuits further increase the risk, particularly in crowded commercial areas. These dangers are well known and are addressed worldwide through fire safety codes designed to protect lives and property. In Pakistan, they are often ignored.

Basic fire safety measures are neither complex nor optional. Clearly marked and unobstructed emergency exits, illuminated exit signs with battery backup lasting at least 35-45 minutes during power outages, and properly placed fire extinguishers in every shop and enclosed space are essential.

Automatic sprinkler systems are now standard in modern buildings, but their absence in many large commercial complexes in Pakistan reflects a troubling disregard for human life.

Smoke alarms happen to be critical as modern systems can automatically shut down air-conditioning and electrical systems when smoke is detected, helping slow the spread of fire.

The role of an efficient and proactive fire department is equally vital. Fire safety inspectors should carry out mandatory inspections at least twice a year to ensure compliance with safety standards.

These inspections must be thorough, documented and enforceable. Inspectors should also provide basic training to shopkeepers and staff on how to use fire extinguishers, guide people to emergency exits, evacuate immediately without attempting to save belongings, and contact emergency services without delay. Fire engines with sufficient water supplies and ambulances must reach such incidents swiftly. Repeated tragedies have shown that these procedures are often poorly implemented, particularly in Karachi.

Unfortunately, the Gul Plaza fire highlights a recurring pattern of negligence by builders, property owners and regulatory authorities. Occupancy permits are routinely issued without full compliance, and violations are overlooked through indifference or compromise.

This negligence carries a human cost that the people of Pakistan can no longer afford. This is a moment for collective national responsibility. Citizens must refuse to live, work or shop in buildings that do not meet approved safety standards. At the same time, the government must enforce the law without exception, withhold occupancy permits until all fire safety requirements are met, and revoke licences where violations persist.

Public safety must never be negotiable. Real change is urgently needed, not only to prevent future tragedies, but to protect the life, dignity and future of the people.

Habib Hyder Laghari
Edmonton, Canada

Death traps

THE recent fire at Gul Plaza proves that most buildings in Karachi remain death traps, and that nothing would be done to ensure that such incidents do not happen in the future. Of course, there are people in the government whose duty it is to ensure that buildings are constructed with adequate safety precautions and have at least two emergency exits. There must be those who are required to visit such buildings periodically and ensure that fire prevention SOPs are being observed.

And we can be sure that, on paper at least, such officials have reported that all places they have inspected are safe, just as there are factory inspectors who never visit factories because they are paid to stay away and generate all-good reports.

That said, can everything be blamed on the government? What about the shopkeepers themselves? It has been many years since I last went to Gul Plaza, and I saw that many shopkeepers had kept their goods in the passages leading to the exits. This would have made it very difficult for their customers to quickly get out of the building in an emergency.

As for fire prevention measures, it is simply out of the question. Purchasing fire extinguishers and recharging them every six months is both time consuming and cumbersome. And, in any case, why waste one's money on frivolous things like fire prevention measures? Right?

Of course, if relevant inspectors had regularly visited the building and imposed fines on errant shopkeepers, this tragedy could have been avoided. But, then, such officials have only one thing in mind: how to speedily recover the money they have paid to get transferred to Karachi, and how to become millionaires in a couple of years. Absolutely tragic.

Shakir Lakhani
Karachi

Occupational safety

THE tragic fire at Gul Plaza in Karachi, which claimed several lives, injured many and caused huge financial losses, has once again exposed the poor state of occupational health and safety in Sindh. Although the Sindh Occupational Safety and Health Act, 2017, exists, its implementation remains weak and ineffective.

The council formed under the Act has failed to play an effective role, while most commercial plazas and markets continue to operate without basic safety measures. Besides, proper emergency exits, fire extinguishers and regular inspections are largely absent. The Sindh government must urgently implement the law in letter and in spirit. The Occupational Safety and Health Council should be made functional, health and safety inspectors should be appointed, and mandatory safety training and certi-fication for shop-owners should be ensured to prevent such avoidable tragedies. Loss of life due to negligence is unacceptable, and things must not be allowed to continue this way.

Abdul Latif Junejo
Hyderabad

A city neglected

IT is devastating to see Karachi suffer. One often wonders why it is always Karachi. This city has given so much to the country, but it continues to be treated with disregard and disrespect. The recent fire at Gul Plaza has once again underlined the level of this administrative neglect. Only last year, a massive fire had erupted at the Millennium Mall, destroying more than 250 shops. This time the number of shops gutted is way higher. According to firefighters, heavy smoke and lack of uninterrupted water supply had made it extremely difficult to control the earlier blaze quickly.

These incidents indicate a lack of proper checks and balances regarding the safety of occupants in buildings, including commercial malls. The relevant authorities appear indifferent, failing to ensure that buildings are equipped with emergency exits, fire alarms, firewalls, or other systematic safety measures that could save lives.

What is most troubling is that every time a tragedy occurs, the government suddenly realises that such issues exist and need attention. It is often the working class that bears the heaviest burden.

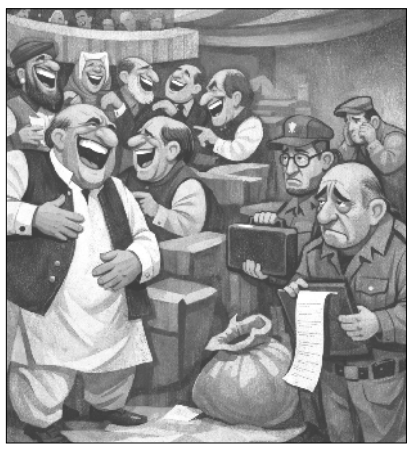
Despite paying taxes and adhering to regulations, citizens are frequently denied access to basic facilities, such as timely ambulance services, effective firefighting, and adequate policing.

Law and order in the city has weakened to the point where citizens are vulnerable to crimes, with incidents ranging from theft to violence over small possessions, such as mobile phones. Accountability remains minimal, leaving many to feel abandoned and forced to rely on self-help.

A city that contributes so much to the national economy deserves more than reactive sympathy. It deserves safety, protection and respect. Karachi's citizens cannot continue to bear these tragedies.

Isra Solangi
Karachi

MNAs and tax returns



AS a sitting Member of the National Assembly, I feel very embarrassed and discomforted that 159 of my colleagues have failed to file their income tax returns, which, indeed, is their national duty.

Politicians already have a poor image and repute in front of the masses, and when they see their rich and wealthy representatives not filing their income tax returns, they experience a very bad taste in the mouth. I appeal to my colleagues that, if they have nothing to hide, be forthcoming and set a good example for one and all.

MNA Isphanyar M. Bhandara
Islamabad

▶ **TANGLED WIRES:** On most roads and streets across Karachi, tangled electric, internet and cable wires hang loosely from poles and buildings. This has created an ugly sight and posed a major safety hazard to anyone walking across streets or commuting on roads. Due to poor regulation and negligence on the part of relevant authorities, unused and damaged wires are left unattended, many of which fall during rain or strong winds, causing accidents, power failures and even electrocution. Pedestrians, motorcyclists and schoolchildren are especially at risk from low-hanging cables, while the cluttered wiring also disrupts proper maintenance of the electricity infrastructure. The authorities concerned must remove illegal wiring, and promote underground cabling to ensure cleaner, safer and more organised roads in the city.
Sajid Ullah
Karachi

▶ **THE HEALTHCARE PROFESSION:** Being a professional doctor in Pakistan is not easy as doctors have to deal with a lot of pressures on a daily basis. After reaching a certain point in professional life, we have to master one thing, which is, to be patient, calm and composed in every single situation. We, the doctors, need to embrace the principles of ethics and professional morality in our practice.
Dr Kaleem Ullah
Multan

▶ **CHOOSING SILVER:** Once gold used to be the symbol of wealth and prestige in Pakistani weddings, but rising prices and economic devaluation have made it increasingly unaffordable for many families. In this scenario, silver has now emerged as a practical and elegant alternative. Modern silver jewellery is as stylish and prestigious as gold. Beyond its beauty, silver serves as a store of value and is likely to retain or even increase its worth in the future, making it a smart investment for households. Choosing silver allows families to celebrate weddings with grandeur without financial strain. It is a valuable, durable and socially respected metal that combines tradition, modern aesthetics and economic sense.
Dr Saif Ali Kakepoto
Hyderabad

External Ombudsman

Veteran journalist Muhammad Ali Siddiqi is *Dawn's* External Ombudsman (DEO). His duty is to attend to our readers' complaints, and to respond to them professionally. DEO is the investigating authority to whom all complaints can be referred, and it is DEO who takes notice of any alleged violations of *Dawn's* code of ethics, and informs the Editor for appropriate action.
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